



## Twilight of Internet Freedom?

It's no secret that the federal government — the FCC, in particular — has been seeking for years for ways to take control of the Internet. For a decade and a half now, the Web has been a blessed enclave of liberty where the grasping hand of the state, with its stifling regulations and debilitating taxes, has been unable to penetrate. Now, according to the Washington Times, the feds are at it again, and this time, they're serious:



The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is poised to add the Internet to its portfolio of regulated industries. The agency's chairman, Julius Genachowski, announced Wednesday [Dec. 1] that he circulated draft rules he says will "preserve the freedom and openness of the Internet." No statement could better reflect the gulf between the rhetoric and the reality of Obama administration policies.

With a straight face, Mr. Genachowski suggested that government red tape will increase the "freedom" of online services that have flourished because bureaucratic busybodies have been blocked from tinkering with the Web. Ordinarily, it would be appropriate at this point to supply an example from the proposed regulations illustrating the problem. Mr. Genachowski's draft document has over 550 footnotes and is stamped "non-public, for internal use only" to ensure nobody outside the agency sees it until the rules are approved in a scheduled Dec. 21 vote. So much for "openness."

It's easy to see why Beltway insiders like Genachowski are desperate to rein in Internet freedom in the name of "equal opportunity," a "level playing field," or whatever other faux justification is offered up. After all, the Internet has permitted the rise of independent media like this website, and has fueled Establishment-busting movements like the presidential candidacy of Ron Paul. It has helped to educate millions of people in the once-arcane doctrines of political and economic freedom, and to shine unprecedented light of public scrutiny on congressional hearings and other official goings-on that our political leadership would rather keep under wraps. While the Internet — like human society generally — certainly has a dark side, there can be no question that a free and open Internet has been the single most important force that has helped to turn the tide of Big Government unleashed during the 20th century.

This is why government bureaucrats are running scared. In rapid succession we have seen the election of a host of promising new congressmen (including Ron Paul's son, Senator-elect Rand Paul), a public furor over the new virtual strip searches at American airports, and now the latest in a train of damaging



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revelations of U.S. government misdeeds by WikiLeaks; all of these developments have been driven by the Internet. It is no exaggeration to say that, thanks to the Internet, American public skepticism regarding Beltway elites has never in living memory been higher.

Now, if the FCC has its way, the sun is about to set on Internet freedom. If the other media regulated by the FCC are any example, we can expect web service providers to be required to guarantee “equal opportunity” for differing points of view, and to curtail altogether points of view deemed discriminatory or hateful. We will see government taxes on web service providers and perhaps on heavily trafficked websites. All this, and much more, as the *Washington Times* noted, will be foisted on an unsuspecting American public without so much as a by-your-leave.

The Internet, by its very existence, has struck a blow against generations-old acceptance of rule by elites. The elites, it would appear, are preparing to strike back.



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